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# Targeting A 'Mad Dog'

With two U.S. aircraft carriers at the ready, Reagan weighs options for attacking Libya's Kaddafi

**D**ay after day, Ronald Reagan kept building his case against Muammar Kaddafi—and hinting that the United States was ready to hit him again. This time the *casus belli* was the La Belle discothèque bombing in West Berlin. The president's counselors said they had worked up an "indisputable" trail of evidence connecting Libyan agents to the murderous blast. Two U.S. aircraft carriers took up positions within striking distance of Libya. Reagan suggested he was only waiting for clear battle conditions and a complete dossier on the Berlin case before striking. Turning up the rhetorical heat, he called Kaddafi "this mad dog of the Middle East." Going the boss one better, a senior U.S. official said, "We all know what you do with a mad dog."

With the USS Coral Sea and the USS America both in the Mediterranean, one plausible scenario was that Reagan would send Navy jets from the carriers to bomb airfields, missile batteries, radar towers or other military targets along the Libyan coast. In addition, NEWSWEEK has learned, Washington has quietly asked Egypt to allow the USS Enterprise, now stationed in the Indian Ocean, to pass through the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean. The president's advisers were confident they had the hardware to carry out a successful strike—and to best anything Kaddafi might throw back (page 22). United Nations Ambassador Vernon Walters also left on a trip to London, feeding speculation that Washington might try to launch a raid with U.S. Air Force FB-111 bombers based in Britain. The president's advisers were leaning against two other options: trying to take out Libya's oilfields or hitting suspected terrorist training camps. But there was still an outside chance they might go after some of those targets.

As the days dragged on, however, it became increasingly difficult to sort out the administration's real intentions from misguided leaks and deliberate disinformation. Reagan's advisers were still dicker about what to do. Some members of the team argued they had been too slow and too public about preparing their attack. They advised waiting until Kaddafi's next out-

rage, which they predicted could come any time. Washington had some good reasons for taking its time: it wanted to clinch the La Belle case, muster allied support and assemble maximum firepower. Making a virtue of necessity, some officials also argued that the delay wore down the Libyans and kept them off balance.

Still, the dawdling added to the risks in taking another poke at Libya. The unseemly dribble of leaked battle plans gave Kaddafi plenty of time to get ready. One danger was that the Libyans would down or capture American servicemen. "If I were a Navy pilot expecting to fly missions over Libya, I would be feeling very cross right now," said one Western diplomat in Washington. "First they leak my targets. Now they delay things to give Kaddafi good time to prepare."

Another peril was that Kaddafi might retaliate by launching terrorist attacks in the United States. But Americans are already at risk. NEWSWEEK has obtained a summary of intelligence reports prepared by U.S. officials that suggest that Kaddafi has stepped up surveillance of American citizens, businesses and government posts. According to the reports, U.S. embassies in Greece and nearby NATO countries—probably Italy and Turkey—are targets of Libyan plots, as are U.S. embassies in 10 African countries. Three Libyan agents entered an African country with plans to attack the U.S. chancery and kidnap the ambassador. One U.S. ambassador in the Middle East has been targeted for assassination. In a Latin American country, a car with Libyan diplomatic plates was caught tailing a school bus filled with American children. Western sources have also uncovered evidence that Kaddafi is offering to pay Iran and Islamic Holy War in Lebanon \$100 million for the six Americans they are holding. And U.S. intelligence has learned that Kaddafi is plotting to attack U.S. "commercial interests"—primarily banks—in Europe and the Middle East.

**Long struggle:** In any event, Washington faced the risk of a protracted, escalating struggle, and some of Reagan's advisers worried that Americans may not have the stomach for that kind of fight. Over the

long run, strategists believed that the European allies and the moderate Arabs would support a move to get tougher with Kaddafi—and that the Soviets didn't care enough about their mercurial ally to allow his fight with Washington to upset arms-control talks or planning for another summit. Even so, another round with the colonel—particularly if it got bloody—could fray U.S. relations with all of those parties.

Although the dangers were clear, the president's aides argued strongly that they had ample cause for taking a second crack at Kaddafi. After the Gulf of Sidra skirmishes, they had hoped to deter Libya's terrorist adventures by leaking what U.S. intelligence knew about them to the press (NEWSWEEK, April 7). But as one top U.S. official put it, Kaddafi's suspected role in the West Berlin bombing and several other attacks since then suggest that "he's decided to go ahead no matter what." Privately, the president and his senior aides conceded that their test of wills with Kaddafi might not end until Kaddafi was dead. They had no intention of trying to do the job themselves, but they hoped America's military pressure might encourage disgruntled Libyan officers to move against their leader. There were reports Reagan might decide against a strike if the allies agreed to tougher economic and political measures against Libya. Otherwise, his aides said, the president could still give the "go" order.

**'Proportional response':** The debate turned on the policy of "proportional response" that Reagan approved at a National Security Council meeting on March 14. The doctrine, which holds that the force of U.S. retaliation should match the strength of Kaddafi's attacks, was the brainchild of national-security adviser Vice Adm. John Poindexter (page 24), and it played a crucial role in persuading reluctant Defense Department officials to agree to challenge the Libyans in the Gulf of Sidra. This time, senior U.S. officials said, the Joint Chiefs of Staff laid out a full range of military options for Reagan and the National Security Council immediately after the Berlin bombing. Over the next three days new reconnaissance photos were reviewed and the list of targets was narrowed; then Reagan approved an attack "in principle."

Defense Department officials were ready to move quickly. At the Pentagon, NATO commander Gen. Bernard Rogers and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. William Crowe reviewed the firepower

needed to carry out a strike. Pentagon officials were determined to stick to the criterion of "proportionality"—and they read that as meaning an attack on limited targets such as the radar array around Tripoli. Then, according to Defense Department officials, the president and his other advisers decided to consider larger targets such as Libya's airfields. The military brass went back to the drawing board.

During most of the week the president had the guidance of advisers who were bullish on retaliation: Poindexter, Shultz and White House chief of staff Donald Regan. Two officials who favored greater restraint were out of town: Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger was in Asia and Australia, and Vice President George Bush was in the Persian Gulf. Over the weekend they both returned to Washington, and the president was expected to consult them before making a final decision. Through most of the deliberations Reagan kept his options open, according to a senior official. But he did insist on several preconditions for a strike: that Kaddafi's link to the Berlin bombing be firmly established; that any raid pose minimum risk to civilians, and that an attack entail an "acceptable ratio" of potential U.S. casualties.

Of all the options, the most likely to meet Reagan's guidelines was sending jets from the carriers to hit Libyan military positions. Most of those targets lie along the northern coast, reducing the exposure of Americans to hostile fire or capture. Administration officials were eager to ground the Libyan Air Force, which has bases at Umm Aitiqah, Okba ibn Nafa and Al Adem, either by destroying runways or attacking parked planes. If Kaddafi's ships sailed out to take on the Sixth Fleet, commanded by Vice Adm. Frank Kelso, there was the possibility of attacking naval bases at Benghazi and Tripoli. During the Gulf of Sidra confrontation, U.S. bombers took out a radar tower at a SAM-5 missile battery in Sirte. But the Libyans quickly rebuilt it, apparently with the help of Soviet advisers and free-lance British engineers. U.S. intelligence indicated they were also scrambling to complete a SAM-5 position in Benghazi. If the United States went after the missile sites again, administration sources said, it would hit the radar antennas, then follow up by destroying the launchers and any missiles stored nearby.

The administration had also not ruled out a longer range hit. From the start the Pentagon had liked the option of dispatching the British-based FB-111s, which can move fast, fly low and carry a heavy bombload. At first, according to British officials, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was cool toward the proposal. But the sources said she warmed up after U.S. officials let the British see their full file on Kaddafi's links to the La Belle blast. As Vernon Walters left for Europe, Thatcher was said still not to like the idea of using Britain as a staging area but to be willing to go along if Reagan insisted. In another sign the ad-

ministration might be leaning toward the Britain scenario, several U.S. tanker aircraft, which could be used for in-flight refueling, took wing for American air bases in the United Kingdom.

The president's advisers rejected other possibilities as too dangerous. The CIA had identified some three dozen camps where it suspected the Libyans of training terrorists. But top U.S. officials argued that strikes on those targets might also hit civilians. Senior planners pointed out that an attack on Libyan oilfields, pumping stations and loading docks could endanger innocent oil workers, including Americans and Europeans. Senior officials said they gave only limited consideration to a joint ground operation with Egypt—a move that Arab diplomats in Washington advised could have disastrous consequences for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

**Intercepted messages:** While it weighed its military choices, the administration also worked to tie Kaddafi to the Berlin bombing. Senior officials in Washington echoed reports that U.S. intelligence had intercepted messages between Tripoli and the Libyan People's Bureau in East Berlin. In late March, they said, Tripoli instructed the bureau to carry out an undisclosed "plan." On April 4 the bureau informed its capital that the operation would take place soon. Hours later—after the attack on the discothèque—the Libyans in East Berlin reported that they had executed the plan. Then on April 6 Tripoli exhorted other People's Bureaus to follow East Berlin's example. The Washington sources also seconded what NATO commander Rogers said after a speech in Atlanta: that U.S. commanders had gotten wind of an imminent attack and tried to alert nightspots favored by American servicemen—but that they were "15 minutes too late" to save La Belle.

White House officials were eager to manage the evidence, however, both because they wanted to make sure it was accurate and because they wanted to wait for an official announcement until they were ready to take military action. As a result, they refused to back up two top-level officials who went public prematurely. One was Rogers, who went on the record after his address in Atlanta. The other was U.S. Ambassador to West Germany Richard Burt, who bragged about the administration's goods on the "Today" show. According to one Reagan aide, White House officials didn't dispute the information Burt mentioned, but they were "looking for more." They also charged Burt with being publicity hungry. "Some people can't avoid kissing a television camera when it's pointed at them," sniped one senior Reagan official.

**When the president did lay out his case against Kaddafi, he was likely to cite more than the La Belle blast. Senior U.S. officials said they had intelligence about Libyan**

**involvement in a rocket attack against the American Embassy in Beirut last week and in two other terrorist plots since the Gulf of Sidra showdown. They said one was a plan to assassinate U.S. Ambassador to France Joe Rodgers; however, both French and Western sources in Paris denied knowledge of such a plot. U.S. intelligence sources said Kaddafi recently instructed two Lebanese Army officers with close ties to Syria to "activate" a plan to kill American diplomats in Beirut. The sources also said a number of defecting Libyan agents—including some Libyans, but mostly Palestinians, North Africans and West Europeans—had provided details on Libyan plots against Americans. The sources said that this information was sometimes paid for with a few hundred dollars—and that some of it had been confirmed independently.**

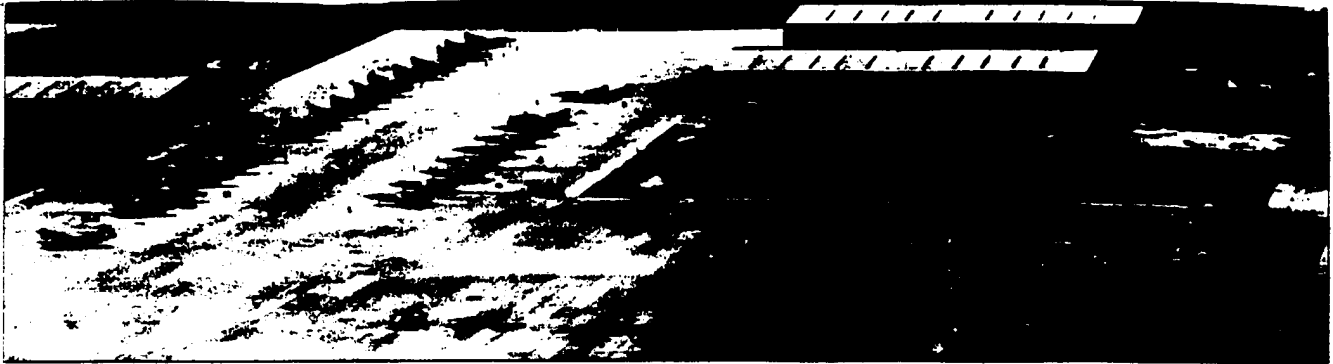
**European doubts:** In the campaign to rally allied support, the State Department sent cables on Kaddafi's links to terrorism to major West European capitals. But only the British were shown raw transcripts of the intercepted Libyan messages. The other allies saw paraphrases. That appeared to explain why the West Germans sounded circumspect about the evidence in the La Belle case, even though they verified the thrust of Washington's allegations. Responding to U.S. pressure, the French threw out two Libyan diplomats two weeks ago. Last week Bonn also expelled a couple of Libyan envoys. But the allies continued

to resist U.S. requests to shut down the People's Bureaus or to impose tougher economic sanctions against Kaddafi. Since private U.S. firms still do a lot of business with Libya, they maintained that Washington's demands were hypocritical. In addition, they repeated their longstanding argument that sanctions don't work.

Many Europeans also worried that Reagan's war with Kaddafi had become counterproductive—and they were joined in that concern by many Arab diplomats and U.S. foreign-policy analysts. The skeptics argued that bloodying Kaddafi might only make him more of a hero to his people. "Kaddafi would have to hire every Madison Avenue PR firm to get what Reagan is providing him with," said one French official. They also stressed that even if Libya's troublemaking was stopped, terrorists would still get aid and comfort from the likes of Syria, Iran and the Soviet Union. "Terrorism has been around forever and it is going to be with us forever," pointed out Gary Sick, a former NSC officer under Jimmy Carter. As Reagan and Kaddafi moved closer to the next round in their grudge match, however, those calculations appeared almost moot. Both sides had raised the rhetorical stakes so high that they seemed compelled to act—and the fight was likely to get nastier before it was over.

MARK WHITAKER with JOHN WALCOTT,  
JOHN BARRY and THOMAS M. DEFRANK  
in Washington and bureau reports

STAT



JOHN BRAT—SYGMA

**Outclassed and outnumbered:** Some of the colonel's MiG's at a Libyan air base outside Benghazi, east of the disputed Gulf of Sidra

## Hitting Back at Libya: How the U.S. Might Do It

**M**ilitarily, it's no contest. The world's most technologically formidable arsenal is squaring off against an Arab power with far more bluster than brawn. The biggest challenge is defeating Libya's air defenses—and inflicting enough damage to keep Kaddafi's forces from rebuilding as they have done before.

Blinding enemy air defenses is the first priority in a surgical strike. U.S. fighters, bombers and electronic-warfare planes streaking off the carrier decks would work much like a football offense with some players clearing a path for the player carrying the ball. Navy A-6E Intruders and A-7E Corsair bombers are the deadly ball carriers. Sophisticated F/A-18 Hornet and F-14A Tomcat fighters would take on any Libyan jets sent up to intercept the air armada. EA-6B Prowler aircraft would provide

vital support by fooling enemy radar. Each Prowler carries five long pods under its wings to listen for enemy radar signals; on-board computers match them against a stored "library," pinpointing their source. Specialists on board distort the radar pulses, sending back false readings about the aircraft's altitude and course. A Libyan radar operator might think he saw many planes, or his screen might be snowed like a broken TV set.

**Wire spaghetti:** The standard attack plan is to run two U.S. strike groups toward the enemy radar at once. One group would consist only of EA-6B's, trying to look like as many aircraft as possible; the other would consist of attack planes,

trying to look inconspicuous. To determine which was the attack force, Libyan operators would have to leave their radar transmitting—long enough, theoretically, for U.S. bombers to close in, launch their missiles and peel for home. Their HARM's (high-speed anti-radiation missiles) would zero in on the radar beams at speeds up to Mach 2, their 46-pound warheads shredding the transmitting grids into wire spaghetti. Also in HARM's way: radio towers near Tripoli that serve vital communication roles.

With its radar blinded, Libya's Soviet-made SAM anti-aircraft missiles would be virtually useless. Other U.S. attack planes could follow in and destroy the SAM's with Rockeye cluster bombs. The Rockeyes—each releasing 247 armor-piercing darts—could also make Swiss cheese out of any Libyan planes sitting on Kaddafi's airstrips. To destroy aircraft in hangars, the Navy has CBU-72 explosive bombs that spray 200 pounds of fuel in a fine aerosol, then ignite the cloud, creating a wave of pressure strong enough to collapse almost any structure.

**More firepower:** Fully destroying Libyan airfields or oil facilities would require more firepower than carrier-based aircraft provide. But Air Force B-52s flying from stateside bases or FB-111s from U.S. bases in Britain could pulverize either. Both could be refueled in midair by KC-135 tank-

ers, hit their targets and return home without stopping. Kaddafi's new SAM-5s are designed to thwart such high-flying B-52s, so destruction of the missiles by low-flying carrier-based planes would be an essential prelude.

Kaddafi's defenses have other weaknesses. SAM radars are difficult to operate in hot climates; they overheat at midday and freeze at night. And they are only as good as their operators; Libya has few trained technicians. The lack of skilled pilots is also the Achilles' heel of Libya's Air

Force. There are plenty of opportunities for problems. Two carrier-based planes were shot down over Lebanon in 1983, and Libyan air defenses are more formidable than those. Last month U.S. HARM missiles managed to knock out only one of seven radars at Libya's SAM-5 site near Sirte, and even one operating SAM-5 could do serious damage. But on paper at least, Kaddafi's forces are heavily outnumbered, which is exactly what U.S. strategists hope he knows.

MELINDA BECK with  
JOHN BARRY in Washington

Force, already outclassed by the Navy's Tomcats, Hornets and their high-tech air-to-air missiles. Facing those odds, six Syrian pilots on loan to Libya refused to take off in Kaddafi's Soviet-made MiG's during last month's Gulf of Sidra dustup, and Libya mounted little air challenge. Kaddafi's missile ships, meanwhile, would run up against the Navy's Harpoon antiship cruise missiles. Launched from A-6E Intruders or cruisers like the Yorktown, the huge sea-skimming Harpoons have built-in radar to home in on moving targets.



SYGMA

**In HARM's way:** *Soviet-built SAM-2 antiaircraft missiles*

## Targets of Opportunity

Reagan could hit air and naval bases, radar stations or terrorist camps

